



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



PENTAGON HONORS SD GUARD FAMILY READINESS GROUP

Many Soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard can feel overwhelmed with anxiety and stress when they say goodbye to their parents, spouse or children before stepping onto a plane headed toward a combat zone. The stress can be caused by a number of things including the Soldier's concern for his or her loved ones wellbeing, but with help from the Family Readiness Group their stress is reduced.

The 235th Military Police Company FRG leaders Christina Schmit, Janna Christiansen and Liz Whitrock helped alleviate stress by building relationships between the wives, parents, children and grandparents before during and after the company's nine-month deployment in Afghanistan. Not only were new relationships born but an exceptional FRG group was formed earning the 2013 Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Award for the National Guard at the Pentagon Hall of Heroes in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 28.



Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs Mr. John Hastings presented the awardees with a commemorative plaque and framed certificate along with a cash award from the Military Officers Association of America. The cash award is to be used to further enhance the unit's family support programs. The RFRA recognizes one National Guard and Reserve unit from each of the seven Reserve components with the best programs to support their families. The program was established in 2000 to recognize the top unit Family Readiness program in each Reserve component that demonstrated outstanding family readiness while maintaining superior mission readiness.

One reason the FRG became a success is due to achieving the commander's goal of providing a friendly environment that encouraged people to participate in unit activities.

Inside this issue:

Operation RAV Blog	2
VA's Budget	2
MJFSVH Team Wins Nemo 500	3
Troops to Teachers	3
Heroes Among Us	4-5
Upcoming Events	6

Heroes Among Us—
showcasing 125 South Dakota
veterans.



ZIMMERMAN BLOGS ON OPERATION RAV

SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman recently participated in a blog interview with Directional Motivation. Much of the interview focused on Operation RAV. Zimmerman also addressed veterans issues both nationally and within the state of South Dakota.

Zimmerman applauded the efforts of the Directional Motivation team and the impact they have on veterans and their families. Zimmerman thanked Directional Motivation for authoring a great resource for veterans—"Deployment to Employment: A guide for military veterans transitioning to civilian employment" (www.directionalmotivation.com/books.php).

The blog can be viewed at:

<http://www.directionalmotivation.com/blog/south-dakota-department-of-veterans-affairs-larry-zimmerman-interview/>

CARE AND BENEFITS FOR VETERANS STRENGTHENED BY \$164 BILLION VA BUDGET

Continuing the transformation of the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a 21st century organization, the President has proposed a \$163.9 billion budget, a 6.5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2014, that will support the VA's goals to expand access to health care and other benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end homelessness among Veterans. The budget includes \$68.4 billion in discretionary spending, largely for healthcare, and \$95.6 billion for mandatory programs – mostly disability compensation and pensions for veterans.

"This budget is a tangible demonstration of the President's commitment to ensuring veterans and their families have the care and benefits they've earned and deserve," said U. S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The \$68.4 billion total in discretionary spending includes approximately \$3.1 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and veteran copayments.

"We remain committed to providing veterans the opportunity to pursue their education, find meaningful employment and access high-quality health care," Shinseki added. "From the men and women of 'the greatest generation' to the veterans who have returned from our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, no one deserves it more."

VA operates one of the largest integrated health care systems in the country with nearly 9 million enrollees; the ninth largest life insurance program; monthly disability pay, pensions and survivors payments to more than 5.1 million beneficiaries of monthly pay, pensions and survivor benefits; education assistance or vocational rehabilitation benefits and services to 1.2 million students; mortgage guaranties to over 2 million homeowners; and the largest cemetery system in the nation.



MJFSVH TEAM CAPTURES PLACES AT THE NEMO 500 OUTHOUSE RACE



Staff members at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home are committed to South Dakota's veterans and the communities in the Hills.

Team MJFSVH won their division at the Nemo 500 Out-house Race. Team members included (left to right) Tom Inman, CHF Schneider, Dan Inman, Ann Remington, and Denise Turner. Congratulations and thanks for all you do!

TROOPS TO TEACHERS

The Lewis & Clark Region Troops to Teachers Program, a regional office servicing Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming, is designed to assist qualified military personnel make the transition from the armed services to service in the classrooms of our schools. The program helps connect individuals with information, institutions and the people that can help participants navigate and meet state certification requirements and ultimately find a teaching position. Over 12,000 Troops-to-Teachers participants have been hired nationally in public schools through the program.

The Troops to Teachers (TTT) program was initially established in 1994 to address force restructuring in the military by assisting retiring and separating active duty military personnel transition to new careers in public education. The military drawdown is over and the program has been redefined to address the actual and projected nationwide teacher shortage.

Troops to Teachers State Representative in South Dakota is Bill O'Dea of Belle Fourche. More information about their program can be found at: www.montana.edu/ttt



HEROES AMONG US

Richard Halbert is a South Dakota native from Highmore.

He enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1964 and served as an instrument repairman with the 563rd Tactical Fighter Squadron at Woodbridge-Bentwater AFB in England.

Richard began working for 3-M, transferred to Bobcat Corporation and spent 35 years as an assembly person at the Bobcat plant at Gwinner, North Dakota.

After retirement Richard continued working his hobby farm at Veblen, South Dakota.

Richard is an active member of American Legion post 76 at Veblen, and is continually helping with all Post activities. Richard continues to be active with the LaCoteau Saddle Club and is active in his church as an usher and member of the finance board.

Thanks Richard, for your unending services to this state and country!!!!



HEROES AMONG US

James Stearns, born and raised in Madison, SD, graduated from high school in 1950. He served in the National Guard from 1947 to August 1950. He then joined the United States Army and served until 1952, serving one year in Alaska.

Jim continued to served in the South Dakota National Guard for over 30 years.

Jim has been active in the American Legion Post in Madison for over 60 years. He is a life member and has served at the commander and currently serves as the adjutant and the finance officer. Jim is still active in assisting with military funerals.

When he returned from Alaska, Jim went to college and began his career with the telephone company and continued on this endeavor for over 32 years.

Community involvement is a priority for Jim. He has served on the Madison Volunteer Fire Department for over 22 years, a life member of

the VFW, and belongs

to the Elks Lodge, Izaak Walton and is a member of the Trinity Lutheran Church.

Jim and his wife have five children, six grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Thanks Jim, for your unending services to this state and country!!!!



Upcoming Events

2014

Mar. 21—Veterans Legal Services Workshop—VA Sioux Falls—4th Floor—9:00 am
Apr. 5-6—152nd Yellow Ribbon
Apr. 7—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—BHNC—9:00 am
May 2-4—DAV State Convention—Ramkota Hotel—Aberdeen
May 6—SDDVA Mini Conference—Sturgis - Veterans Club, 868 Main Street—10:00 am (MT)
May 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pierre - American Legion, 520 S. Pierre Street—10:00 am (CT)
May 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings - City/County Building, 520 3rd Street—10:00 am (CT)
Jun 5-8—VFW State Convention—Custer
Jun. 19-22—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre
Jul. 7—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—BHNC—9:00 am
Aug. 6—DOL Veterans Job Fair—Augustana College Elmen Center—10:00 am—2:00 pm
Aug. 25-29—NACVSO Training Ramkota Hotel—Pierre
Oct. 6—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—BHNC—9:00 am

The schedule for RAV Open Houses throughout the state can be found at::

<http://vetaffairs.sd.gov/publicaffairs/upcomingevents>.



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